

THE BATTLE OF THE WARSAW GHETTO

BY

MORTON WISHENGRAD

AUSPICES OF

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ANNOUNCER: The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto starring Mr. Raymond Massey.

OPENING ANNOUNCEMENT:

The National Broadcasting Company in cooperation with the American Jewish Committee brings you a special Jewish holiday broadcast commemorating the eight-day festival of Hannukah, which begins next week. Hannukah celebrates the heroic Maccabean revolt against the Syrians and symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness. Today you will hear a modern parallel of the Maccabean Revolt, with a dramatization of "The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto" written by Morton Wishengrad and starring the distinguished actor of stage and screen, Raymond Massey, as Isaac Davidson.

(CANTOR: EL MOLE RACHAMIN, UNACCOMPANIED - 20 to 30 SECONDS AND FADE UNDER FOLLOWING).

VOICE: (IN CLOSE, SOFTLY) It is a prayer for the dead...El Mole Rachamin. Hear him with reverence, for it is no ordinary prayer and they are not the ordinary dead. They are the dead of the Warsaw Ghetto -- the scapegoats of the centuries. Once the priest robed himself in linen and stood on Sinai in a convocation of Israel; and they brought unto him a live goat, chosen by Lot. And he laid his hands on the goat's head and confessed over it the iniquities of the people. And he released the goat, and its name was Azazel, scapegoat, and it fled into the wilderness. But for them in the Ghetto of Warsaw there was no release....there was only the abyss. In the Ghetto thirty-five thousand stood their ground against an army of the Third Reich -- and twenty-five thousand fell. They sleep in their common graves but they have vindicated their birthright. Therefore, let him sing and hear him with reverence for they have made an offering by fire and an atonement unto the Lord and they have earned their sleep.

(CANTOR: UP AND FINISH)

(MUSIC: ESTABLISH THEME ALMOST AS A SEGUE AND THEN FADE UNDER FOLLOWING)

NARRATOR: (SIMPLY) My name was Isaac Davidson and I lived in the Polish city of Lublin with my wife, Dvora, and Samuel, our son. When Poland fell, they herded us into a cattle car and transported us to the Ghetto of Warsaw. It was a place in Purgatory and around that Purgatory they had built a brick wall and another wall of barbed wire and beyond the wire stood a third wall of soldiers armed with bayonets.

(MUSIC OUT)

(FADE IN SHUFFLING OF FEET AND HOLD UNDER)

NAZI I: All right there, move on. Next, next, next. Lively.

(SHUFFLING OF FEET)

NAZI II: Your name?

NARRATOR: Isaac Davidson.

NAZI II: Who are they?

NARRATOR: Dvora Davidson, Samuel Davidson. My wife, my son.

NAZI II: (STAMPING THERE CARDS IN RAPID SUCCESSION) Three blue cards. Get along.

NAZI I: Next, next, next, move on. Pick up your feet. There's no funeral.

(SHUFFLING OF FEET UP AND FADE)

(MUSIC: FADE NARRATIVE THEME UNDER)

NARRATOR: Three blue cards stamped with the letter J. Bread cards. Each card ...a pound of bread a week. As precious as life. Dvora held the cards in her hand and we went to the tenement in the Twarda District (MUSIC OUT) to the place where we were to live. (FOOTSTEPS GOING UP) We went up the stairs of the tenement, and Samuel and I waited in the hall, while Dvora spoke to the woman who lived there.

DVORA: They said you would know where we are supposed to stay.

WOMAN: Come in, this is where you stay -- in this room.

DVORA: But you live here.

WOMAN: In this corner. The other corner is yours.

DVORA: But I thought

WOMAN: You don't know how lucky you are. This room has a window.

DVORA: Perhaps we shouldn't trouble you. Maybe...some other place.

WOMAN: (LAUGHING BITTERLY) You'll find out. Before they walled the Ghetto, fifty thousand people lived in these slums.

DVORA: Yes, but..

WOMAN: Do you know how many are here now? Five hundred thousand! Five hundred thousand! I know a man who sleeps in a vault in the cemetery. Don't be a fool, come in. It's still better than a cemetery.

(MUSIC: THEME AND UNDER)

NARRATOR: That was our room. And because Dvora lived in it, it was also our home. There was no soap; but she cleaned it. There were no needles, but she made a cloth for the table. There was no lamp in it, yet she filled it with light. And then when she found a box, our son Samuel scrabbled up some earth and a few pathetic blades of grass, (MUSIC OUT) and Dvora put the box on the sill of the window.

(THUMP OF BOX COMING TO REST)

DVORA: There. Now our house has a garden.

NARRATOR: Yes, Dvora. Our house has a garden.

DVORA: You say it as though it is not true. Look, Isaac, look at the sun. There is no land where the sun doesn't shine. Let it shine here on something green in the Ghetto.

(MUSIC: IN UNDER)

NARRATOR: Green grass in the Warsaw Ghetto....a few pathetic blades of green in the scrabbled earth. But a sign of a living spirit and a proof that where the spirit lives there can be no degradation. There in this place of death, shut-off, walled-in, foredoomed, there were things of the spirit done by men and women like Dvora. (MUSIC OUT) In the Ghetto of Warsaw there was beauty, and comradeship and learning.

TEACHER I: (RABBINICAL --FADE IN) There are seven marks of an uncultured man and seven marks of a wise man. Do you know what they are, Samuel?

BOY: The wise man does not speak before him who is greater in wisdom; and does not break in on the speech of his fellow; he is not hasty to answer; he questions according to the subject matter, and answers to the point; he speaks upon the first things first, and upon the last last; regarding that which he has not understood, he says, I do not understand it, and he acknowledges the truth.

TEACHER: And the mark of an uncultured man, Samuel?

BOY: The reverse of all these things.

(CROSSFADE WITH CLASSROOM VOICES AD LIB)

GIRL: (SHE IS STRUGGLING TO MAKE HERSELF HEARD) Weisman's theory of germinal continuity...how can I finish the recitation when they talk?

TEACHER 2: Please all of you. This is a classroom in the Ghetto. It is different from other classrooms. We must be an example. (MURMUR OUT)
Thank you. Go on, Esther. The theory of germinal continuity.

GIRL: The germ contains living material which has come down in unbroken continuity ever since the origin of life and which is destined to persist in some form as long as life itself. While Weismann's name is chiefly associated with this theory, other....

(CROSSFADE WITH LAUGHTER)

MAN I: What's this supposed to be?

MAN II: I don't know. Maybe I'm one of those surrealists.

MAN I: (LAUGHING) Well, don't give up, I'll make a sculptor out of you yet.

MAN II: It's all right with me. If you're willing, I'm willing. But my father made me a plumber and I guess I'll always be a plumber. Now if I had my tools and a piece of brass pipe, I'd show you some real sculpture.

(BOTH LAUGH AND FADE OUT OF LAUGHING INTO)

DOCTOR: Say, Ah. Ahhh!

BOY: (ALMOST GAGGING) Aah, aah.

DOCTOR: Wider...a little more...there, that will do, boy. Why didn't you bring him earlier?

DVORA: It's my fault Doctor. I didn't know there was a clinic.

DOCTOR: His tonsils are badly infected, they'll have to come out.

DVORA: I don't have any money to pay you.

DOCTOR: There's nothing to pay here. Money can't buy what no one will sell to us...drugs, instruments, anaesthesia.

DVORA: Then -- you operate without anaesthesia?

BOY: Please, doctor, will it hurt?

DOCTOR: Yes, it will hurt. In the Ghetto, everything hurts. Perhaps tomorrow it will be different.

(MUSIC: SHORT BRIDGE)

NARRATOR: The Ghetto waited for tomorrow. It tried to do so with dignity and self-respect. Sometimes it was hard. But the Ghetto tried. In the cellars of the tenements the children went to classes, and wherever there was a patch of dirt the older boys studied agriculture; there was a medical clinic, a soup kitchen, nurseries; carpenters taught their trade to clerks with thin chests, the watchmakers, the engravers, the leather workers opened trade schools, the artists taught their art. And all of this was free. Whoever wanted to learn was welcome. It was a somber, grim, melancholy place, heavy with the foreboding of death, but we encouraged each other to work and study and to laugh. Yes, to laugh also -- we organized four theatres. But our greatest pride, our finest symbol was our orchestra -- the Ghetto Symphony.

(FADE IN TUNING OF INSTRUMENTS)

(RAPPING OF BATON)

VOICE: We'll try it again. From the same place. Now watch me. (RAPPING BATON AGAIN) Please, watch the stick. We're going to start together and finish together. All right now.

(ORCHESTRA: AIR FROM SMETANA'S FATHERLAND SUITE - REGISTER AND THEN HOLD UNDER
DROPPING OUT INSTRUMENTS TO SOLO VIOLIN)

NARRATOR: We sat and listened to the Ghetto symphony, feeding our hunger on the clear, sweet sound. But since the Herrenvolk, the Master Race that erected the walls, since they intended that we should be hungry, they came and confiscated some of the instruments. First they took only a few, then more. Our orchestra dwindled. It became an ensemble. And then the Herrenvolk came again and stole more instruments. The ensemble became a quartet. And then....a single solo violin was left. Why did they do it? Perhaps it irritated them -- Jews satisfying a hunger. (MUSIC OUT) We were left with hunger. And where there is hunger, the plague always follows. The plague came and 17,800 persons died of spotted typhus in Warsaw. And of these 15,758 were Jews. A pestilence imprisoned behind a brick wall, a great achievement of medical science; I say it without irony. Yes, 15,758 -- and Dvora Davidson, my wife. 15,759.

(SOUND OF BOY SOBBING SOFTLY)

NARRATOR: (GENTLY) Samuel, leave her. You cannot help her any more.

BOY: Mamma, Mamma, Mamma!

NARRATOR: Come here. She cannot hear you. You are a big boy. You must not cry. Here, let me wash your face. She would not like to see you with a dirty face. Stop crying now.

BOY: I'll try.

NARRATOR: Will you do something for me, Samuel?

BOY: Yes, if I can.

NARRATOR: I want you to go to your corner and try to go to sleep.

BOY: I couldn't....I couldn't sleep, Papa.

NARRATOR: Then go to your corner and turn your face away. Mind me. Do as your father says. That's right, to the wall. You are a good boy, Samuel.

BOY: (CFF MIKE, SUGGESTING FACE TURNED AWAY IN HIS FOLLOWING SPEECHES)

You will not hurt her, Papa?

NARRATOR: No one can hurt her. (PAUSE) I am taking off her clothes. Her apron, her dress, Uncle Avrum's shoes -- everything -- Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return thither.

BOY: (SOBBING) You are going to carry her into the street?

NARRATOR: Yes, after dark I am going to carry her into the street.. and I will leave her there...cold, naked, nameless. You know why I must do this, Samuel. They must not be able to identify her. They must not know who she is.

BOY: (SOBBING) It's because of the bread card, Papa.

NARRATOR: Yes, it's because of the bread card. If they know she is Dvora Davidson, they will take it away.

BOY: Please, Papa, please. Let them take it away. Not in the street.

NARRATOR: It is her last wish, Samuel. The bread card is for you. Honor her last wish. The blue card with the letter J -- a pound of bread a week for her son.

BOY: I won't take it, I can't.

NARRATOR: You must, Samuel. Once you took her milk; now you must take her bread. She leaves you nothing else. You must take it, Samuel -- it is your inheritance.

BOY: (SOBBING LOUDER AND HOLD UNDER PRAYER)

NARRATOR: (VERY SLOWLY)

Yisgadal ve-yiskadash shmay rabo. Beolmo di-vro chirusay, v'yamlich malchussay. Bechayeichon u'vyo meichon. U'vchayei de-chol-bais yisroal ba-agolo U-vizman Koreev. V'eemeru Omain. (FADE ON RECITAL AND SOBBING OF BOY)

(MUSIC: FADE IN NARRATIVE THEME AND HOLD UNDER)

NARRATOR: This was our degradation. In the Ghetto of Warsaw we divided dead men's bread. Have you tasted dead men's bread? The taste is bitter, and it is dry in the mouth because the saliva will not flow. This is what we ate and this is how we lived...the five hundred thousand of the Warsaw Ghetto. But not five hundred thousand for long. On June 22, 1942 armored cars escorted a convoy of black trucks into the Ghetto. They seized men and women and children and packed them into the trucks and these were the uncoffined dead who never returned. And each day thereafter the black trucks came. And each day when they left, there was weeping in the Ghetto. I have seen the faces of the men that did these things. They were men like other men. Some were old. Some were young, with eyes, with skin and flesh and nails and the requisite number of fingers. I looked into their faces and did not believe. But the trucks continued to come. And it must be said that if the thing that they did was monstrous, it was a monstrous thing done with order and with with method; for they take pride in order.

(MUSIC: OUT)

(SOUND OF TRUCKS AND UNDER VOICES)

VOICE I: July 22, 1942.

VOICE II: Six thousand two hundred and eighty-nine.

VOICE III: Destination...Tremblinka.

VOICE I: July 23rd.

VOICE II: Seven thousand eight hundred and fifteen.

VOICE III: Destination...Oswiantzem.

VOICE I: July 24th.

VOICE II: Seven thousand four hundred and forty-four.

VOICE III: Destination...Belzec.

(VOICES AND TRUCK SOUNDS HOLD UNDER NARRATOR)

NARRATOR: Done with method, precise, efficient, recorded. To Tremblinka, Oswiantzem, Belzec, Sobibor, Majdany, a lethal gas chamber, an electric cell, a poison pit, an execution field, a cemetery. And add also ten thousand brave, hopeless, tragic men who seized sticks and stones and knives and bare fists and charged the tanks and tried to halt the trucks. Add their bodies to the list for the ten days of June, 1942. Make your total and then add two methodical, precise documented months in August and September, 1942. Reckon it. Do it carefully. You cannot do it on your fingers. But I will give you the sum. Listen, 275,954 fewer bread cards in the Ghetto! Swift, accurate, final. Quicker than typhus, surer than hunger.

(RUMBLE OF TANKS AND SOUND OF TRUCKS UP FOR BRIDGE
AND TAKE IT OUT WITH:)

(MUSIC: REGISTER SECOND NARRATIVE THEME AND FADE UNDER)

NARRATOR: They sent the black trucks because the hunger and the pestilence were too slow and too merciful. When we were starving, we beseeched the civilized world for food, and when the plague struck us, we appealed for simple things, soaps, medicine, tools for our physicians.

NARRATOR

(CONTINUED): But when the black trucks came we no longer asked for rescue and for mercy -- we asked for weapons. Through the Polish underground which carried our appeals we asked the people of England, Russia and the United States for weapons. And there was silence. You did not answer. And then through the Polish underground there came your answer: resolutions of sympathy, phrased with felicity. It was a greater injury than silence. I who know can say to you that the grave does not yield its tenant for such coin, nor will such coin cause the enemy to lie down and crimson the gutter with his blood. We waited for weapons that did not come. Five hundred thousand waited. Three hundred thousand waited. One hundred thousand waited. And finally thirty-five thousand waited who did not know where to look -- (MUSIC OUT) -- but the answer came from under their feet -- from the sewer under the Warsaw Ghetto.

(ECHO CHAMBER)

(FOOTSTEPS)

VOICE I: Carry it gently, Pan Meyer. Don't let it fall.

VOICE II: I'm carrying it as though it were a case of eggs.

VOICE I: More gently than that, Pan Meyer.

VOICE II: What could be more fragile than a case of eggs?

VOICE I: A case of dynamite.

(FADE OUT FOOTSTEPS...CROSSFADE WITH SLOSHING OF WATER)

VOICE III: The rifles are already distributed. Our men want to know if there will be any machine guns.

VOICE I: If we can get some through, there'll be machine guns. But don't count on it. You'll have to make out with rifles.

VOICE III: It won't be much against tanks and mortars.

VOICE I: It will be better than bare hands.

VOICE III: Yes -- better than bare hands -- much better.

(CROSSFADE WITH TRUNDLING OF BARRELS)

VOICE IV: The Ghetto Council would like to know your name.

VOICE I: What difference does it make?

VOICE IV: They want to thank you.

VOICE I: Tell them to thank the Polish underground. Take good care of those barrels. There are enough grenades in them to blow up every Jew in the Ghetto.

VOICE IV: Then there must be enough grenades in them to blow up every German in Warsaw.

VOICE I: I'm glad you see it that way.

VOICE IV: What do you think we've been waiting for?

(MUSIC: BRIDGE AND SEGUE TO NARRATIVE THEME AND UNDER)

NARRATOR: April 19, 1943. Thirty five thousand men, women, children stood ready. It was the day. Trenches were dug during the night. Every house, every room, every cellar, every roof was prepared. At 4 A.M. a detachment of Storm Troopers in light tanks escorted the black trucks to the walls of the Ghetto. They came as usual on their daily errand. (MUSIC UP HIGHER) We waited until the vehicles were within range.

VOICE: FIRE!

(BLAST OF RIFLE FIRE AND TOP WITH RATTLE OF MACHINE GUNS -- THEN SCREAM OF PAIN)

(MUSIC: CRASHING FINISH)

NARRATOR: The entire detachment was wiped out. In a few hours they came again. SS troops. Our snipers manned the Ghetto Wall itself. We were ready.

(BURST OF FIRE, BATTLE OF MACHINE GUNS UNDER NARRATOR)

NARRATOR: They brought up a loudspeaker

VOICE: (THROUGH LOUDSPEAKER) Jews, put down your guns. You haven't a chance in the world against us. Put down your guns, Jews. We will give you fifteen minutes to make up your minds and then we will come after you. Jews, put down your guns. It's your last chance.

(GUNS AS BEFORE)

NARRATOR: That was the answer. That and the flags of the United Nations which floated over the roofs of the Ghetto.

(SOUND OF DYNAMITE EXPLOSIONS ONE AFTER ANOTHER RAPIDLY)

NARRATOR: More answers, 800 answers. Eight hundred factories producing material for Germany -- blown up by our engineers.

VOICE: (LOUDSPEAKER) You still have another chance. Jews, put down your guns. Put them down and come out of the buildings and you will be treated with mercy. (PING OF SINGLE SHOT) (HE GASPS AND COUGHS AS THOUGH HE HAS BEEN HIT)

NARRATOR: They brought up the regular army. The Ghetto had defeated the Storm Troopers and now it was the Ghetto against the German Army. The Third Front. We retreated slowly from our positions as they sent flame throwers, mortar, cannon, tanks and planes against us.

(BUILD UP VOLUME OF SOUND, SHELLS, MACHINE GUNS, BOMBS, ETC.)

VOICE: April 20th....April 25th....May 2nd....May 5th....May 10th....May 14th....May 18th....May 20th....May 22nd....May 25th....

(INCREASE VOLUME OF SOUND)

NARRATOR: They planted land mines under the tenements, and blew them up one by one. The tenements crumbled but from the rubble of the shattered cellars the snipers kept up a continuous fire. The surviving men and women and children retreated slowly from house to house, erecting barricades in the streets, paying with their lives for every tenement, every room, every step of the way. When their ammunition ran out,

NARRATOR: they used broken furniture as clubs and hurled stones. On the twenty-sixth day the enemy shut off the water supply and planes dropped incendiary bombs.

(TREMENDOUS CRACKLE OF FLAMES ADDED TO SOUND)

The entire Ghetto was in flames. Those who were not burned alive were slaughtered by the Nazis.

(FADE SOUND TO BACKGROUND)

VOICE: (GASPING) Isaac Davidson. Isaac...here...in the trench.

NARRATOR: His right arm had been blown off at the elbow. I spoke to him. Let me tie a tourniquet around your arm.

VOICE: Don't waste the bandage on me. Tell me Isaac how it is going.

NARRATOR: We're still fighting.

VOICE: After thirty-seven days. A few Jews with guns fighting a Nazi army for thirty-seven days.

NARRATOR: The blood ran from the shattered stump and soaked the ground. But he smiled.

VOICE: They are really very foolish. They should have known that the Ghetto would explode.

NARRATOR: They know now.

VOICE: How many did we kill?

NARRATOR: Some say a thousand, some say twelve hundred. The smile lingered on his lips even as his eyes began to glaze - and he spoke an epitaph for the Warsaw Ghetto.

VOICE: It is not for thee to complete the work, but neither art thou free to desist from it. Tell them to mark that on my grave.

NARRATOR: It is not for thee to complete the work, but neither art thou free to desist from it. Yes, tell them to mark that on our grave.

(CANTOR: SINGING UNACCOMPANIED SOLO. EL MOLE RACHAMIN...FADE UNDER NARRATION)

VOICE: Hear him with reverence. For he sings a prayer for the dead -- twenty-five thousand dead. It is no ordinary prayer and they are not ordinary dead. For they are the dead of the Warsaw Ghetto -- in the year nineteen hundred and forty-three. Tonight they sleep in their last trench, their choirs dispersed in ashes, their holy books sodden in the seventh-month rain, the rubble deep on the thresholds of their houses.

They were Jews with guns! Understand that -- and hear him with reverence as he chants the prayer. For on the page of their agony they wrote a sentence that shall be an atonement, and it is this: Give me grace and give me dignity and teach me to die; and let my prison be a fortress and my wailing wall a stockade, for I have been to Egypt and I am not departed.

(CANTOR: UP AND FINISH)

(MUSIC: CODA)

(CLOSING)

CLOSING ANNOUNCEMENT:

You have just heard a dramatization titled "The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto" presented by the National Broadcasting Company in cooperation with the American Jewish Committee, celebrating the forthcoming Jewish holiday, Hannukah. The script was written by Morton Wishengrad and starred Raymond Massey. The program was under the direction of Anton Leader. Music was arranged and conducted by Morris Mamorsky. Cantor David Puttermann sang the liturgical music. Copies of the dramatization, "The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto", may be secured free of charge by writing directly to the American Jewish Committee, 386 Fourth Avenue, New York City 16, N. Y.